United States
Environmental Protection
Agency

Office of Solid Waste
and Emergency Response
(OS-305)

EPA/530-F-92-012
July 1992

Office of Solid Waste

EPA

Environmental Fact Sheet

RECYCLING GRASS CLIPPINGS

Nationwide, State and local governments, lawn equipment manufacturers, lawn care professionals, and others are working to divert yard trimmings from municipal solid waste. The U.S. Environmental Protection Agency (EPA) recommends leaving grass clippings on lawns, rather than collecting and bagging them. Leaving grass clippings on the lawn (1) enhances the natural health of lawns by improving the soil and turf growth, and (2) reduces the amount of waste that must be collected and managed.

Clippings Enhance Your Lawn

EPA recommends leaving grass clippings on lawns to reduce the amount of waste that must be collected and managed and to enhance the natural health of lawns. As short grass clippings filter to the ground and naturally decompose, nutrients return to the soil and support further turf growth by supplying part of the lawn's fertilizer needs. This practice can save about one fertilizer application per year.

Grass clippings increase the soil's organic matter content, along with its ability to retain moisture and nutrients, to resist erosion, and to maintain cooler temperatures during the summer.

The Texas A & M University System and the Texas Agricultural Extension report that clippings usually contain about four percent nitrogen, 0.5 percent phosphorous, and two percent potassium, as well as essential minor elements.*

Why Be Concerned About Grass Clippings?

Nationwide, state and local governments, lawn equipment manufacturers, lawn care professionals, and others are working to divert yard trimmings-including grass clippings, leaves, brush, and tree prunings-from municipal solid waste. By mid 1995, 20 states will have banned landfill disposal of yard trimmings, the second largest component of the solid waste stream. Nationally, yard trimmings account for nearly 20 percent (over 31 million tons) of municipal solid waste generated each year. Grass clippings account for over half of all the yard trimmings generated.

The amount of yard trimmings generated varies considerably by region, season, and even from year to year. During peak months (primarily, summer and fall), yard trimmings can represent as much as 25 to 50 percent of municipal solid waste.

Recycled/Recyclable
Printed with Soy/Canola Ink on paper that contains at least 50% recycled fiber

Clippings and Thatch

Grass clippings do not cause thatch when left on lawns. Thatch, rather, is a layer of organic material comprised of grass roots, not the grass blade that is mowed. Grass roots contain lignin, a substance that is very slow to decompose and causes thatch. Grass clippings, however, which are up to 90 percent water (wet weight) and contain little lignin, decompose quickly.

Making the Switch

To foster healthy standing grass, do not cut more than one third of the blade off, and no more than one inch total, at any one time (the exact mowing height depends on grass type and climate). In making the switch, participants in a Fort Worth, Texas, pilot project found that, since bagging the clippings was no longer necessary, they spent an average of 38 percent less time on each mowing.*

Looking For More Information on Yard Trimmings Management or Other Municipal Solid Waste Issues?

EPA's Office of Solid Waste offers a number of fact sheets and pamphlets on municipal solid waste management for citizens and community leaders. One such fact sheet, *Yard Waste Composting*, takes a general look at the whys, whats, and hows related to backyard composting.

Publications are available by contacting the RCRA Hotline, Monday through Friday, 8:30 a.m. to 7:30 p.m., EST, at **(800) 424-9346**. For the hearing impaired, the number is TDD **(800) 553-7672**. Or write to:

RCRA Information Center (RIC)
U.S. Environmental Protection Agency
Office of Solid Waste (OS-305)
401 M Street SW., Washington, DC 20460.

Another EPA publication, **Yard Waste Composting: A Study of Eight Programs**, is available for a fee from the National Technical Information Service (NTIS). To order, call (703) 487-4650 and ask for publication number PB90-163 114.

Yard Trimmings Management for Homeowners

EPA, in cooperation with the Colorado State University Cooperative Extension, developed a brochure on yard trimmings recycling/composting , entitled **"EASY" (Environmental Action Starts in your Yard)**. This brochure provides more detailed information on advantages of mulching, composting, and other beneficial home uses for yard trimmings. To receive a copy, write to:

George Donnelly
U.S. Environmental Protection Agency, Region 8
999 18th Street
Denver, CO 80202

* *Dr. Bill Knoop, Texas Agricultural Extension Service. The Texas A & M University System, College Station, TX.*